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Alewife: A Plan for Sustainable Development Draft (1/95)

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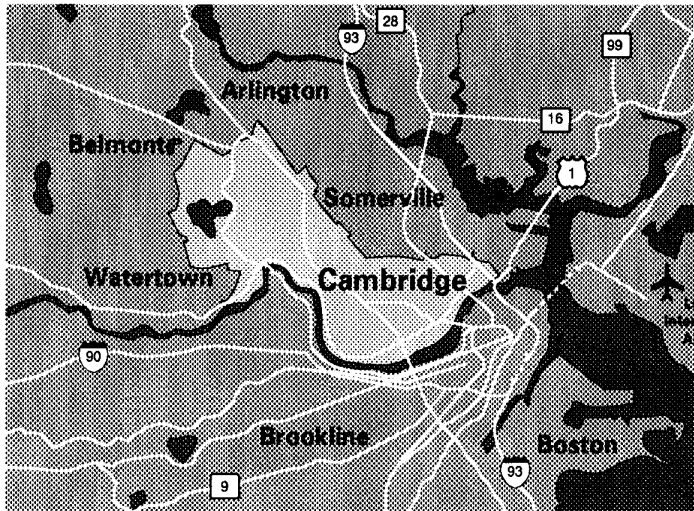
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1 BACKGROUND



Located on the western edge of the city, bordering Route 2, Belmont, and Concord Avenue along the Fresh Pond Reservoir, the 370-acre Alewife area can be characterized in a number of ways: as a transportation corridor, as an environmental resource, and as an economic development district. All of these functions make Alewife a vitally important area for Cambridge and for the region.

This master plan for the Alewife district on the western side of Cambridge is being designed to be consistent with the City's growth policy document entitled *Toward a Sustainable Future*. Planning and design for Alewife and for the growth policy effort have been taking place simultaneously, and both documents are now in draft form. The City intends to continue refining each piece of work, with the overall goal of clarifying a vision for how the City can evolve in ways that respect the concept of "sustainability," defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development as "Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

PLANNING PROCESS

Planning for Alewife dates back over twenty years. The most recent Alewife planning effort resulted in the 1979 publication of the *Alewife Revitalization Plan*. That plan, and a subsequent rezoning of the district, established a set of development goals and guidelines for Alewife. Some of these goals were achieved during the 1980s. The MBTA completed the Alewife Red Line Station and parking garage, and new development occurred along CambridgePark Drive to the west of the Alewife MBTA station and along Concord Avenue. However, at the end of the decade, many of the elements of the plan remained unrealized. In addition, some projects that were built, such as the new office buildings along Cambridgepark Drive, seemed isolated from abutting neighborhoods and did not reflect the traditional fabric of Cambridge.

Concern about Alewife's future was voiced in the 1990 North Cambridge Neighborhood Study. The Neighborhood Study Committee was troubled that the urban design vision for the area had not been achieved fully and felt that it needed to be reexamined. Realizing that most of the development that did occur in Alewife was new or renovated office space, they expressed concern about future development and the types of job opportunities this development would generate.

The North Cambridge Study Committee suggested the formation of a working group to reexamine the 1979 plan and make recommendations on the type and amount of development that is appropriate for each area within Alewife.

Alewife Master Planning Process (1991-1993)

Responding to the recommendation of the North Cambridge Study Committee, the City Manager and the Community Development Department initiated the Alewife Master Planning Study in August, 1991. That fall, at the beginning of the planning process, the City Council passed a resolution confirming that "there is a current need for the City to develop a new master plan for the Alewife area...to guide future development in the area."

The master planning process has involved the active participation of the Alewife Steering Committee, a ten member group representing Alewife businesses, landowners and the abutting neighborhoods, Neighborhoods Nine, Ten, Eleven (North Cambridge), and Twelve (Cambridge Highlands). The Steering Committee's role has been to assist in identifying and refining the major issues affecting the use of land in Alewife, to provide viewpoints and concerns on specific planning issues, to react to and provide feedback on specific planning proposals and to assist in developing recommendations and an implementation strategy for a new master plan. Throughout the process, the Committee strived to reach consensus in their recommendations; however, while there was agreement on the basic goals of the plan, not every Committee member endorses unconditionally every single recommendation. The Committee members do endorse the Plan as a whole.

In addition to the Steering Committee, a Public Agency Committee was formed to help develop the Master Plan and comprises representatives from the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC), Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), Metropolitan Boston Transportation Authority (MBTA), Massachusetts Department of Public Works (MDPW), and the towns of Arlington and Belmont. They have followed the work of the Steering Committee, commented on the committee's recommendations, and suggested refinements and additional recommendations.

Steering Committee Work

For two years, from the summer of 1991 to the summer of 1993, the Community Development Department worked closely with the Steering Committee. During the fall of 1991, the Committee reviewed background information and data, toured the area, engaged in planning exercises and discussed concerns and goals in depth. A public meeting was held to explain the purpose of the study and to elicit comments from the community and landowners regarding their planning issues and goals for Alewife.

From January through August, 1992, the Steering Committee and the Department worked on several substantive planning modules addressing the major issue areas: environment and open space, economic development, housing, transportation, land use and urban design. Preliminary recommendations were developed through these sessions and were presented at a public meeting in October, 1992.

Using feedback from that meeting, the Department together with the Steering Committee reviewed and refined its recommendations. From January through June, 1993, the Steering Committee met with staff to consider implementation strategies and finalize a draft master plan for Alewife. This draft was reviewed by the Planning Board in July 1993. Their review included both discussion of the master plan and its consistency with the planning policies outlined by the Board in its draft of the Growth Policy document, *Toward a Sustainable Future*. The Alewife Planning Study was then revised to reflect the Planning Board's comments and to illustrate the links between this planning effort and the Growth Policy process. That Alewife Planning draft was circulated to landowners, businesses, residents and community groups for comment. A third opportunity for public review and comment was held in November 1993 in the form of a Planning Board meeting, and during the winter of 1994, presentations were made to several business and neighborhood groups. The Planning Board considered the final draft in meetings in early 1994.